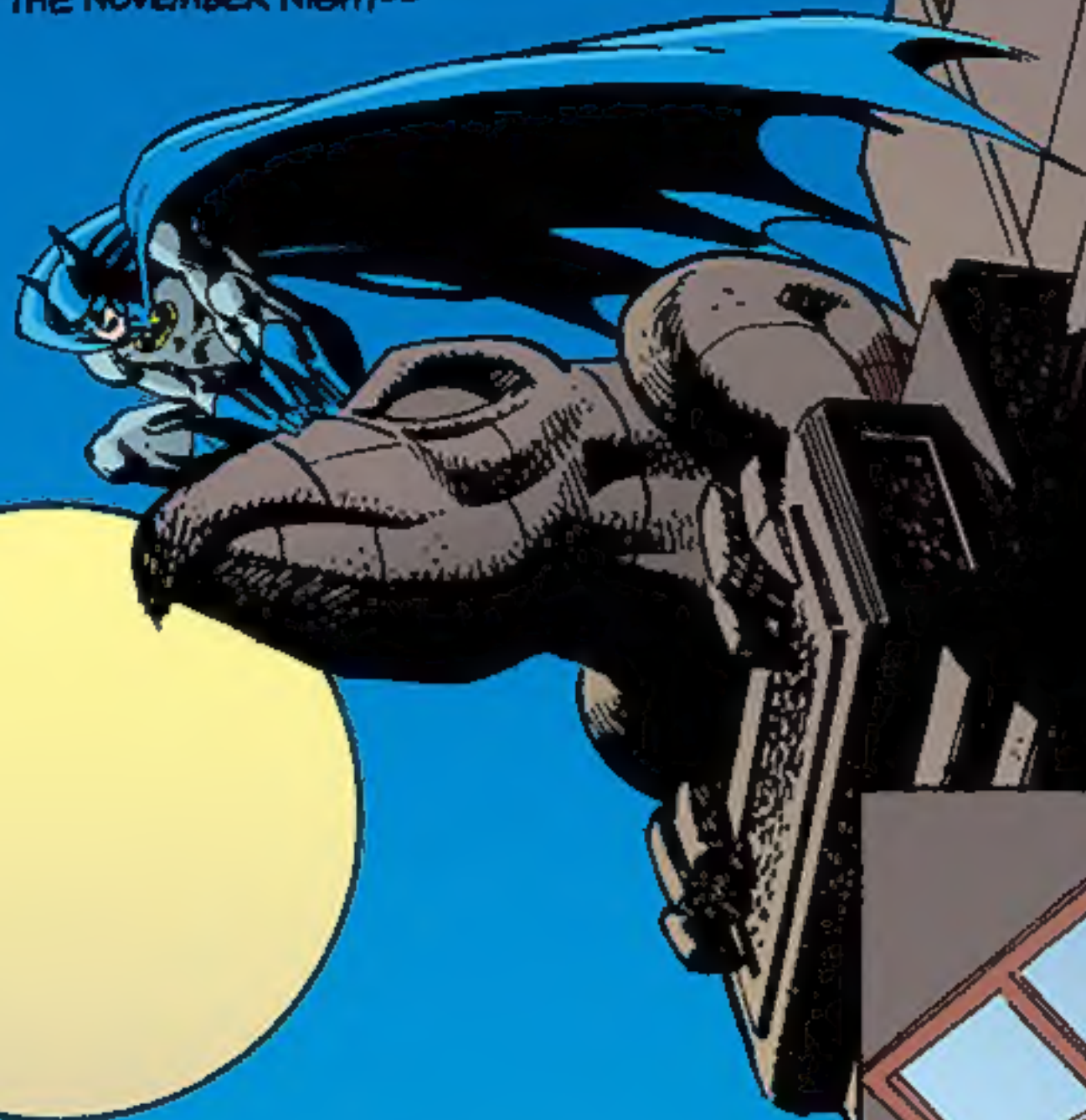


SOON, HE WILL ACT. SOON, HE WILL LEAVE THIS COLD PERCH ABOVE  
THE CITY, FALL THROUGH THE NOVEMBER NIGHT--

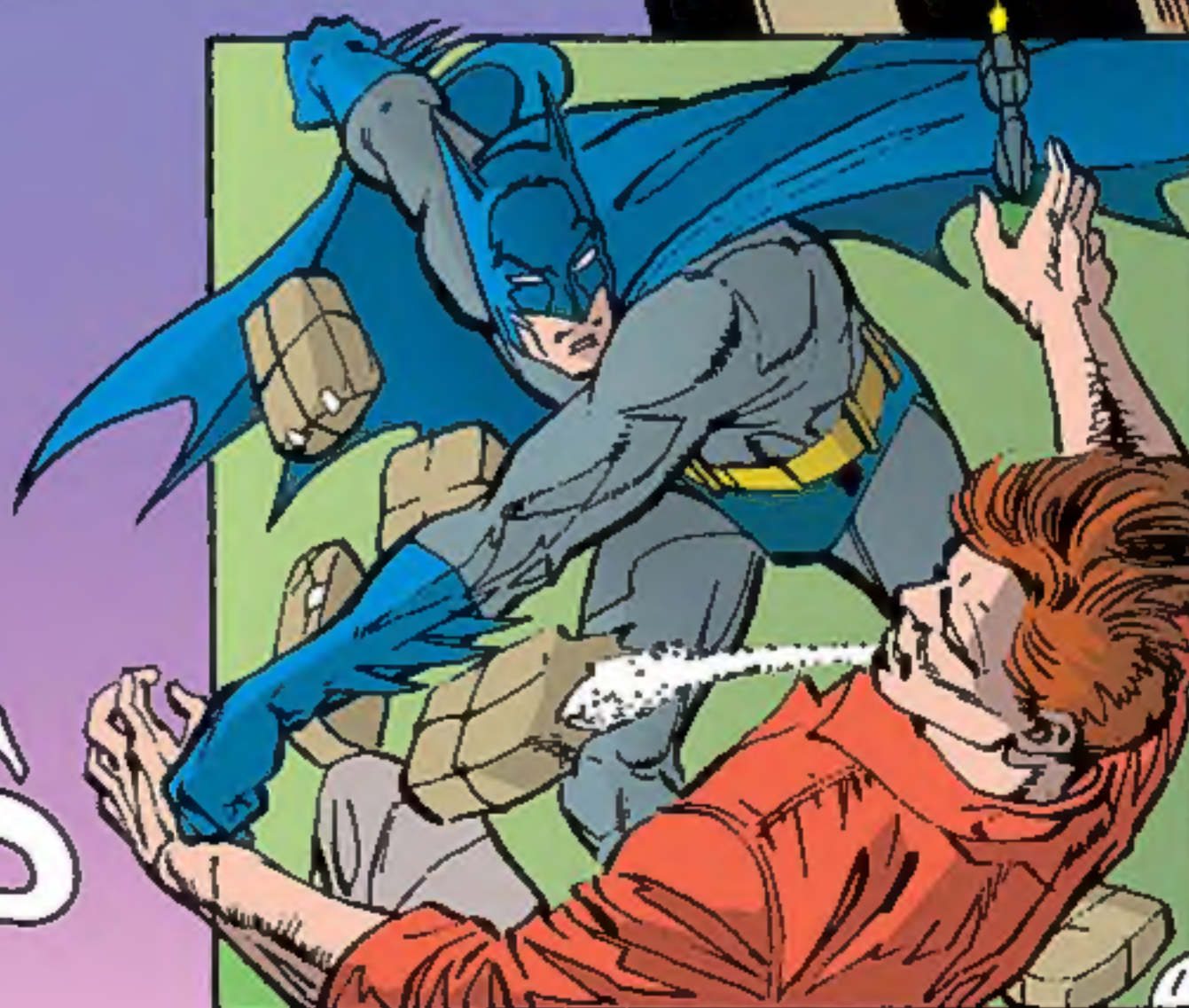


-- AND, IN  
AN EXPLOSION  
OF GLASS,  
BURST INTO  
THE ROOM  
BELOW--



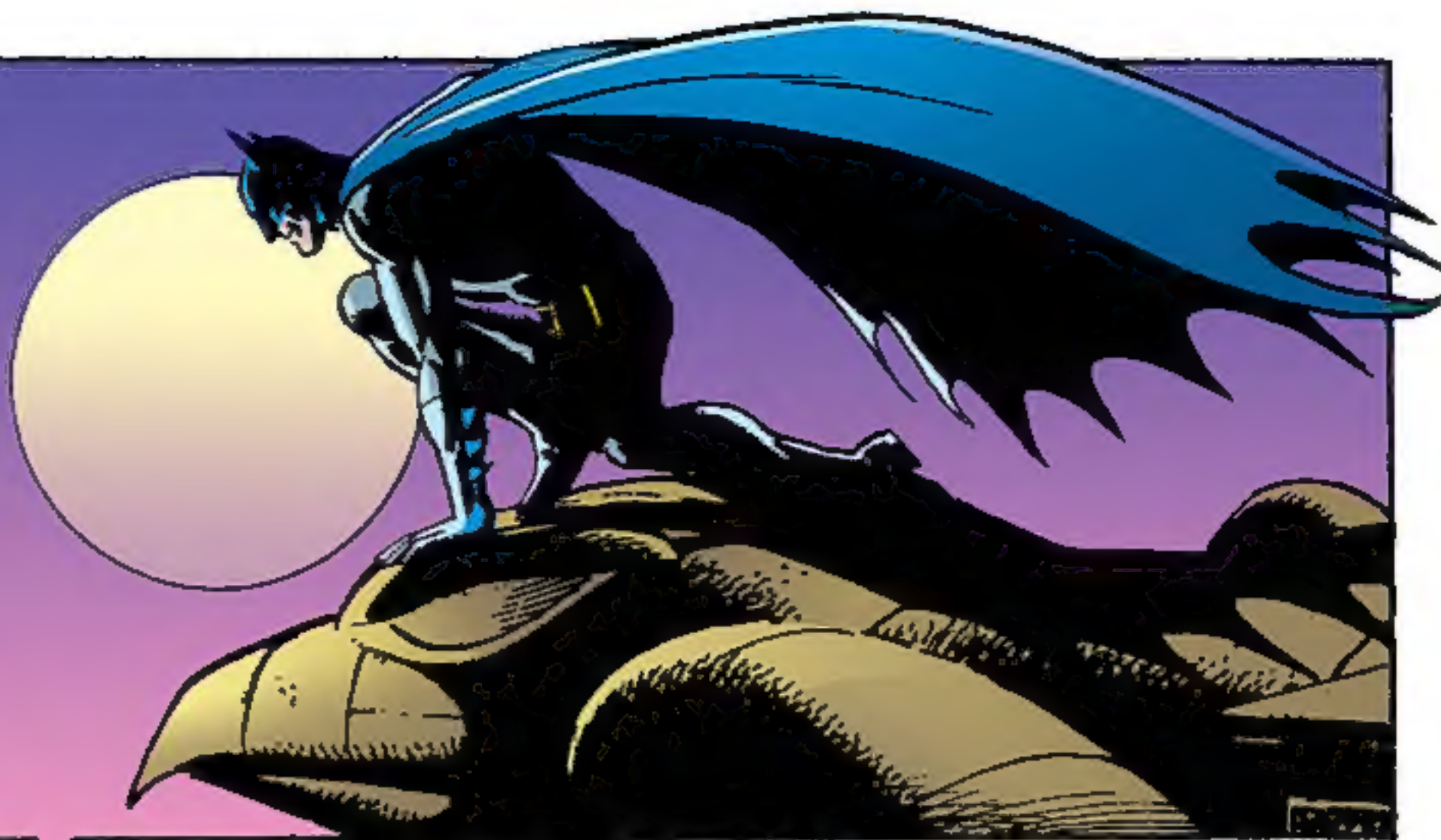
-- AND SWIFTLY,  
EFFICIENTLY,  
SMASH THE  
GREEDY DREAMS  
OF ONE WHO  
WOULD PREY  
UPON THE  
HELPLESS...

# THE MAN WHO FALLS





HE HAS DONE THIS BEFORE. HOW OFTEN? A THOUSAND TIMES? A THOUSAND LONELY VIGILS. A THOUSAND TENSE MOMENTS. A THOUSAND REFUSALS TO BELIEVE THAT HE MIGHT ERR, MIGHT JUDGE BADLY FOR JUST AN INSTANT--



--MIGHT SLIP--



--FALL--



--FALLING, HE SHRIEKED IN TERROR--



--AND THEN, SUDDENLY, WAS SILENCED AS THE STONE SURFACE SLAPPED THE BREATH FROM HIS BODY.



IT WAS DAMP AND STILL DOWN THERE, SOUNDLESS EXCEPT FOR A SLOW, STEADY DRIPPING AND A DISTANT WHISPER OF WIND.



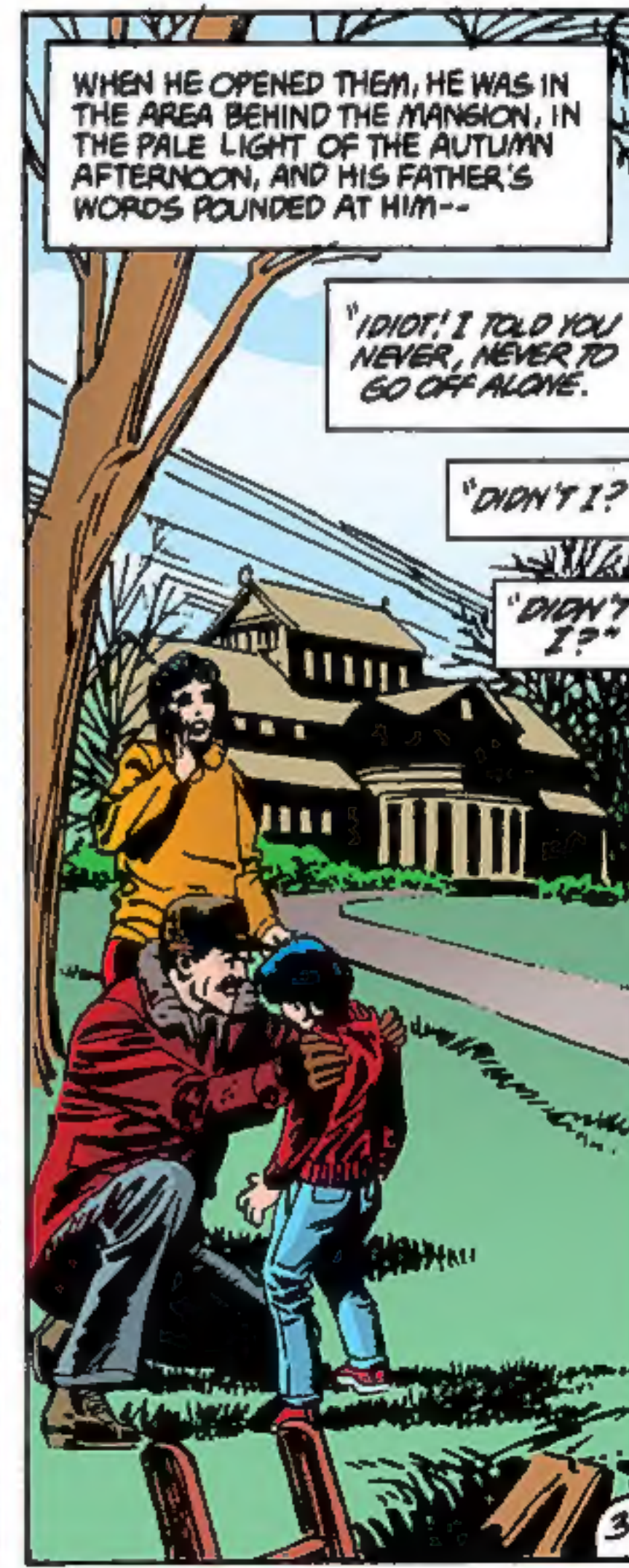
AND SOMETHING ELSE

SOMETHING THAT STIRRED IN THE DARKNESS.

SOMETHING THAT HISSED AND CHITTERED.











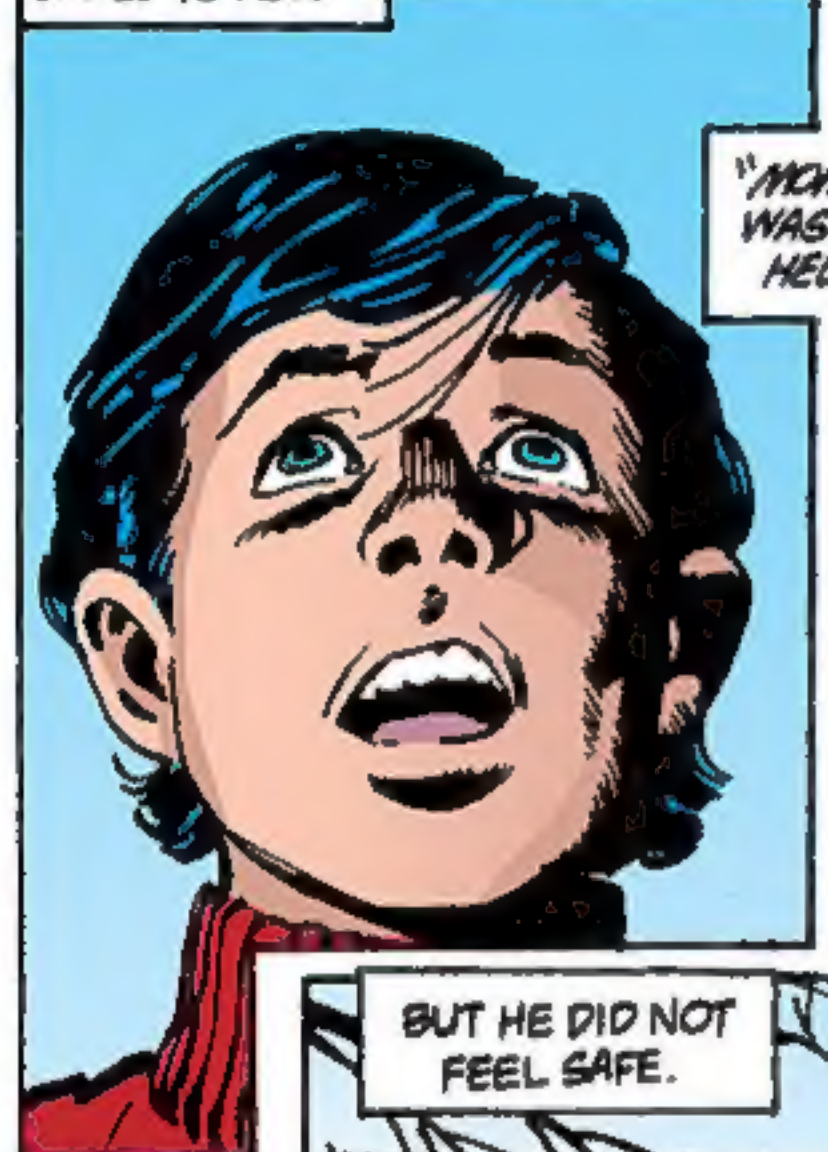
"THOMAS, HE'S FRIGHTENED."

"HE DAMN WELL OUGHT TO BE. HE COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED."



"HE'S GOT TO LEARN."

HE LISTENED TO HIS FATHER'S BOOTS CRUSHING THE DEAD GRASS, AND WHEN HE COULD NO LONGER HEAR THEM, HE DARED TO ASK:



"MOMMY, WAS I IN HELL?"



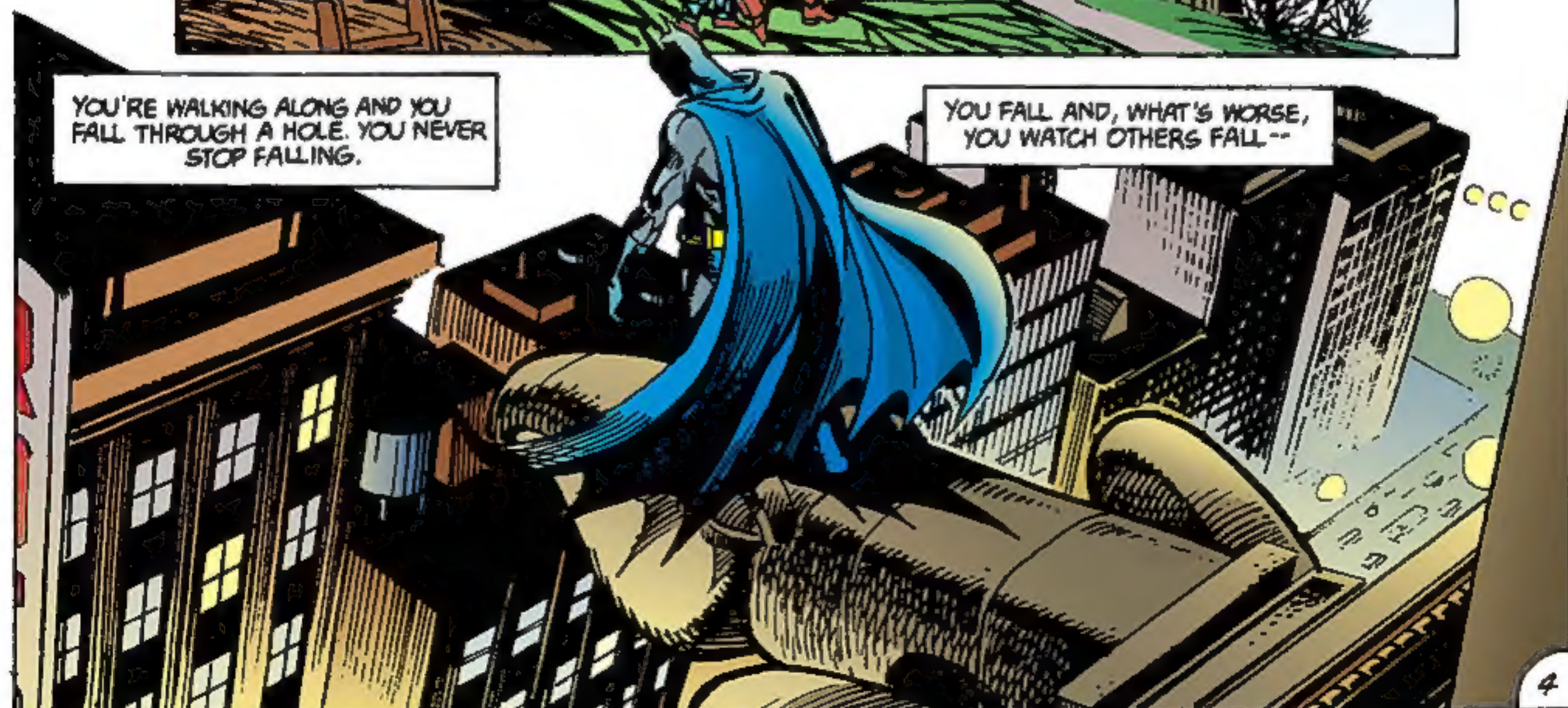
"NO, BABY, THAT WAS JUST SOME OLD CAVE."

"YOU'RE SAFE NOW."



BUT HE DID NOT FEEL SAFE.

THE LIGHT WAS DIMMING, AND SHADOWS SEEMED TO BE REACHING FOR HIM, AND THERE WAS NO WARMTH, NO COMFORT IN HIS MOTHER'S TOUCH...



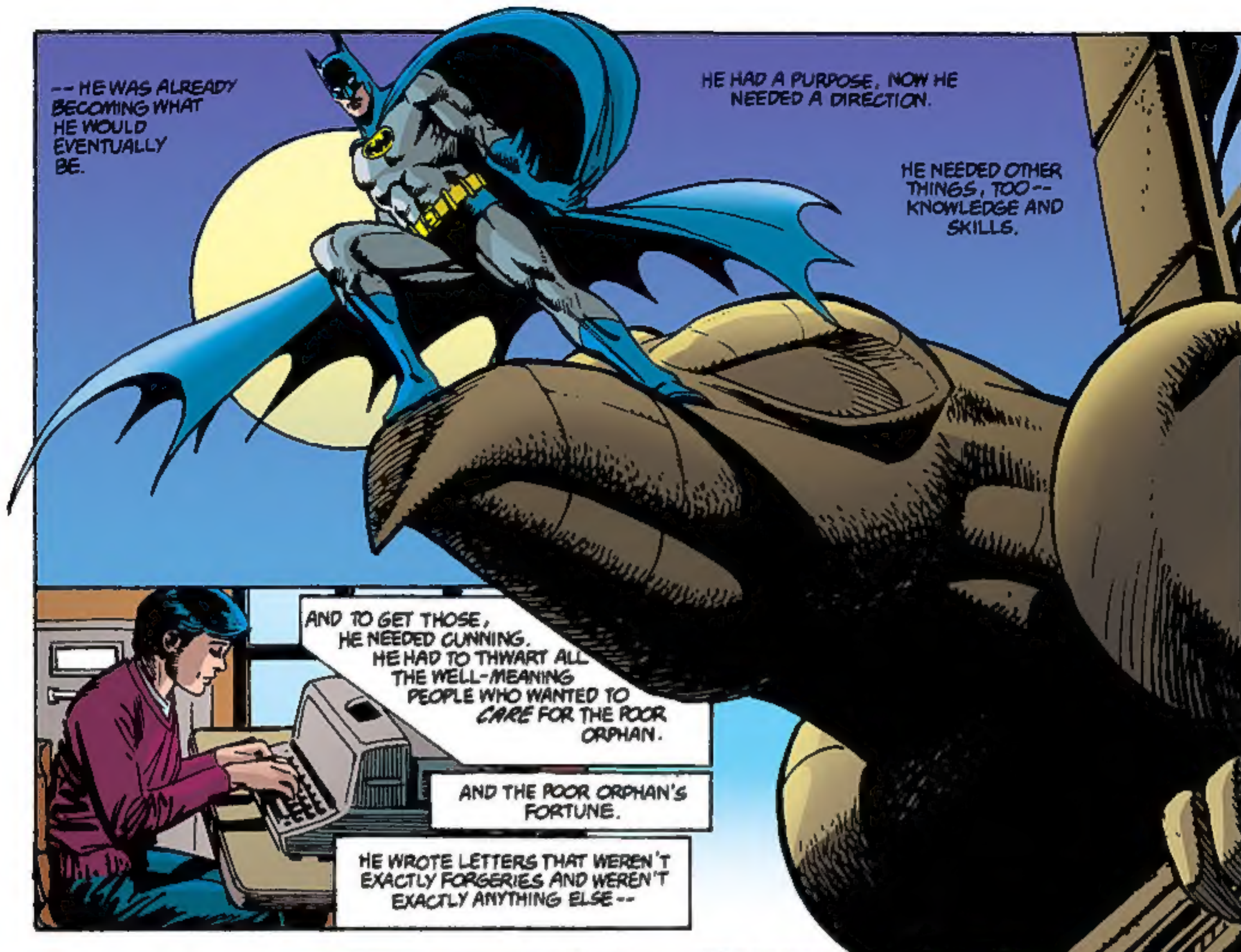
YOU'RE WALKING ALONG AND YOU FALL THROUGH A HOLE. YOU NEVER STOP FALLING.

YOU FALL AND, WHAT'S WORSE, YOU WATCH OTHERS FALL--









-- HE WAS ALREADY BECOMING WHAT HE WOULD EVENTUALLY BE.

HE HAD A PURPOSE, NOW HE NEEDED A DIRECTION.

HE NEEDED OTHER THINGS, TOO-- KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS.

AND TO GET THOSE, HE NEEDED CUNNING. HE HAD TO THWART ALL THE WELL-MEANING PEOPLE WHO WANTED TO CARE FOR THE POOR ORPHAN.

AND THE POOR ORPHAN'S FORTUNE.

HE WROTE LETTERS THAT WEREN'T EXACTLY FORGERIES AND WEREN'T EXACTLY ANYTHING ELSE--



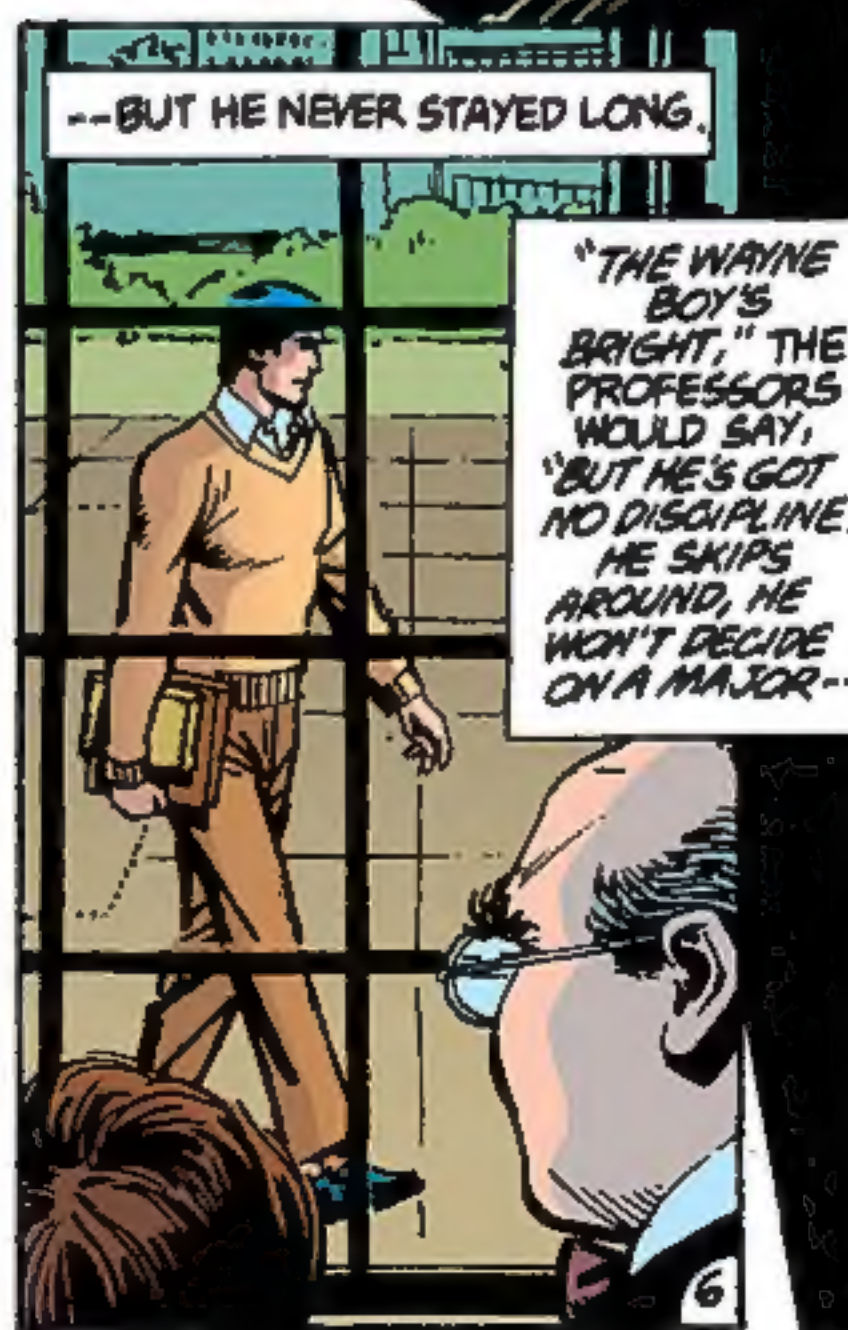
-- AND THEY ENABLED HIM TO LEAVE GOTHAM CITY AT AGE 14 AND BEGIN A GLOBAL QUEST FOR WHAT HE WANTED TO KNOW.



HE VISITED MANY CAMPUSES--



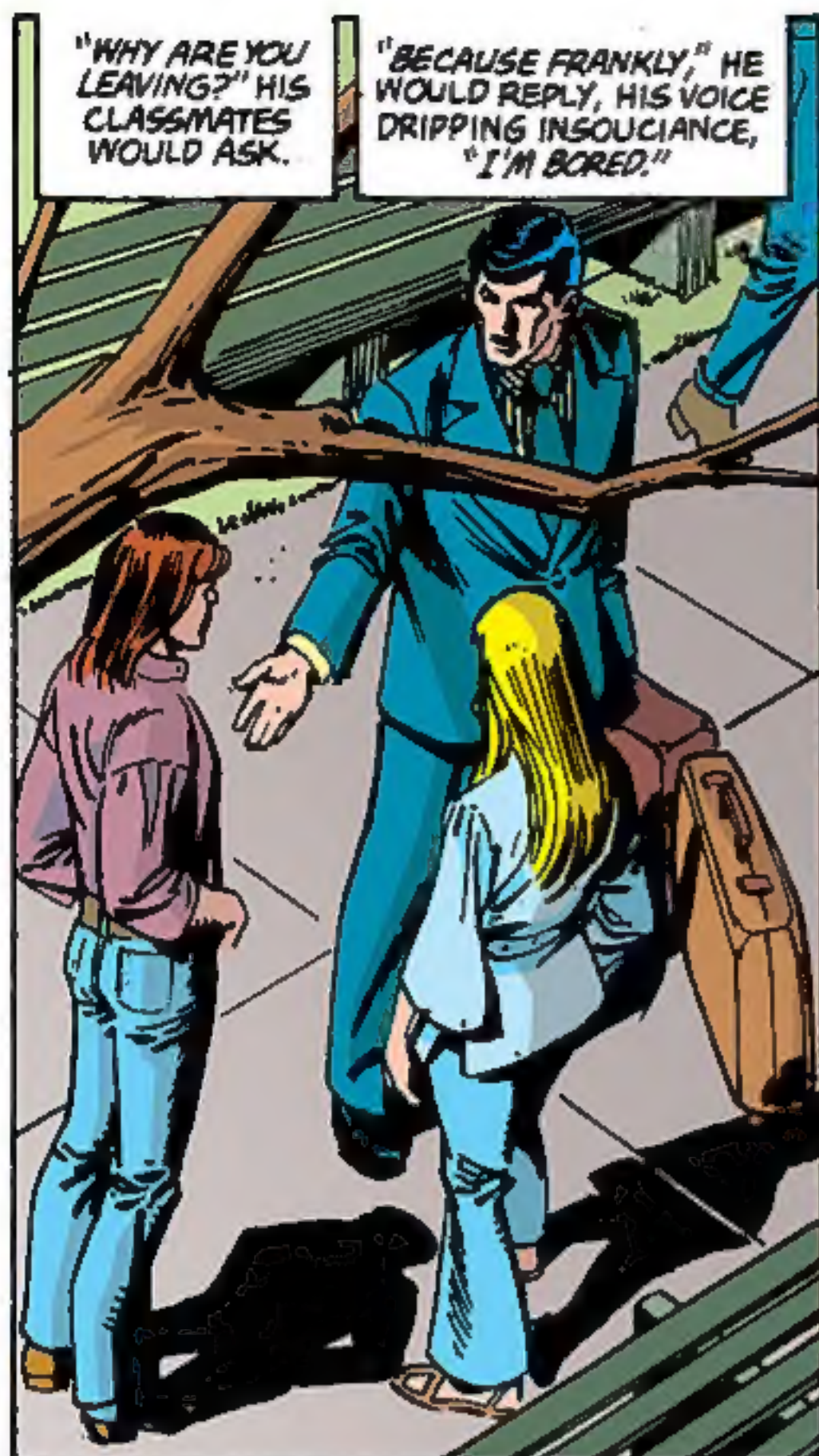
-- AND MANY OTHER PLACES OF LEARNING --



-- BUT HE NEVER STAYED LONG.

"THE WAYNE BOY'S BRIGHT," THE PROFESSORS WOULD SAY, "BUT HE'S GOT NO DISCIPLINE. HE SKIPS AROUND, HE WON'T DECIDE ON A MAJOR--"

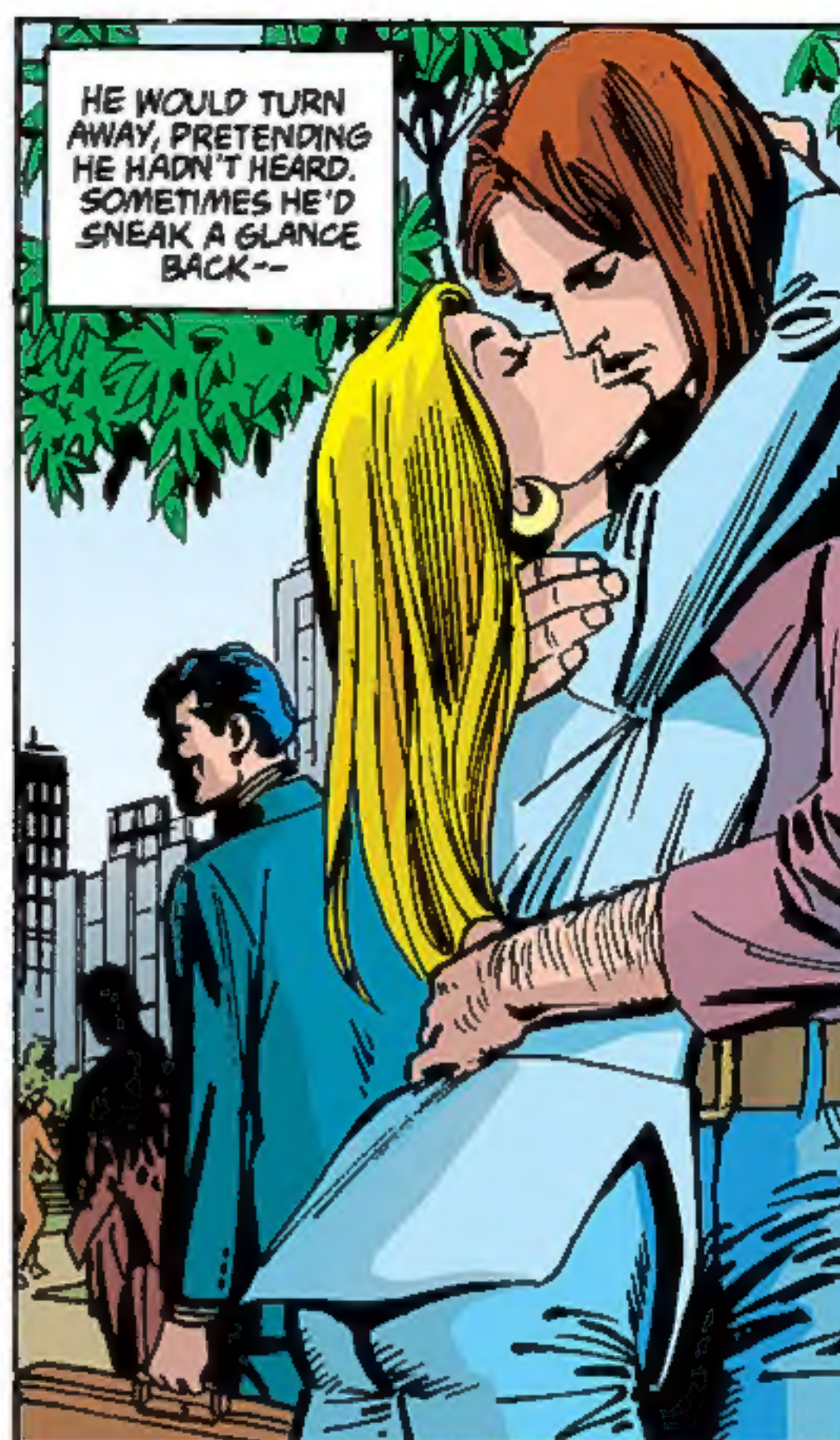




"WHY ARE YOU LEAVING?" HIS CLASSMATES WOULD ASK.

"BECAUSE FRANKLY," HE WOULD REPLY, HIS VOICE DRIPPING INSOLUENCE, "I'M BORED."

"RICH SNOT."



HE WOULD TURN AWAY, PRETENDING HE HADN'T HEARD. SOMETIMES HE'D SNEAK A GLANCE BACK--

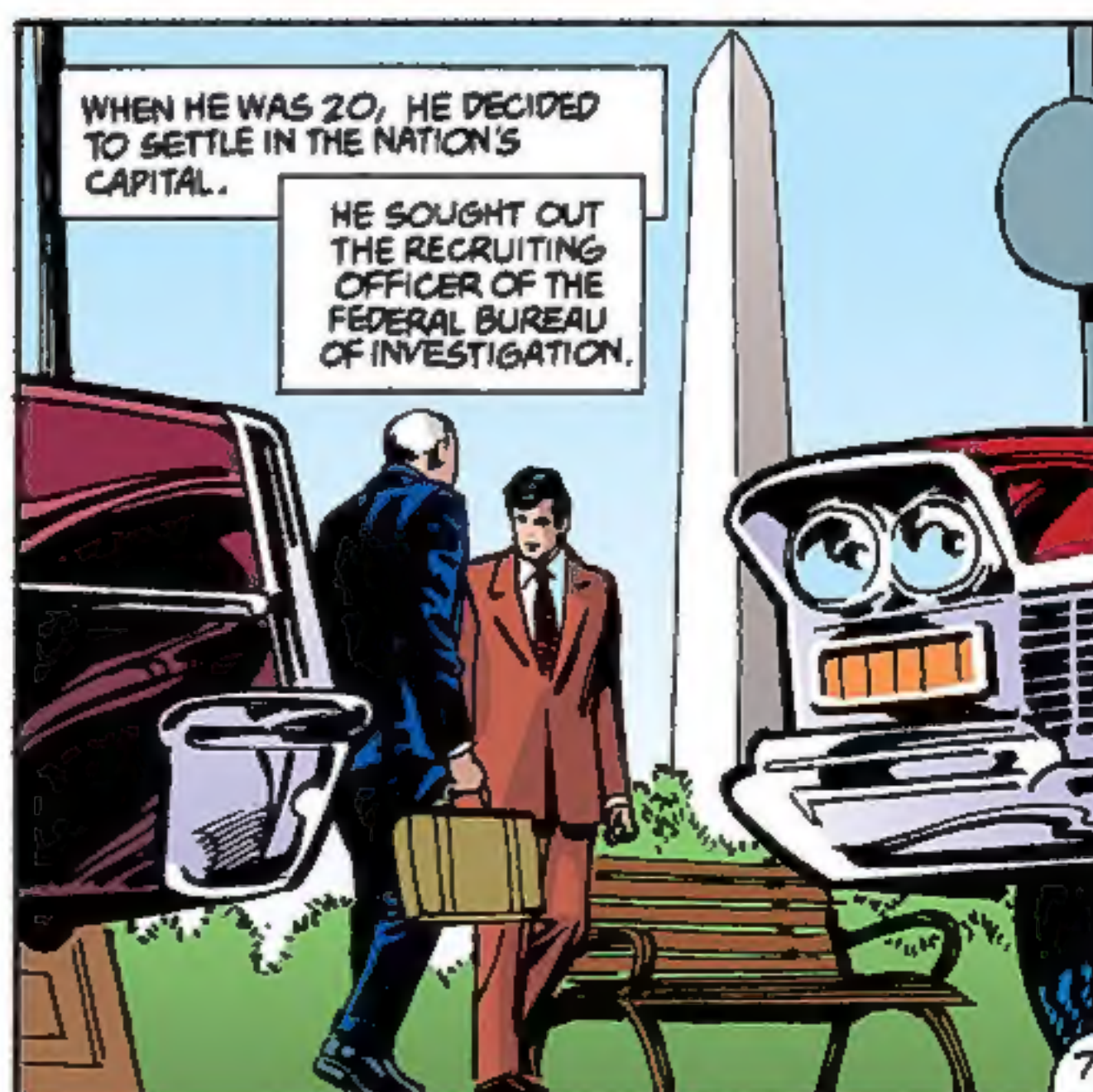


--AND THE ACHE HE FELT SEEMED TO FILL HIS ENTIRE BEING.



HE LEARNED TO IGNORE THE ACHE, AND THE PAIN OF LOSS AND ISOLATION. THEY WERE THE CONDITIONS OF HIS LIFE, AND HE ACCEPTED THEM.

THERE WAS ALWAYS ANOTHER PLANE, OR TRAIN, OR BUS-- ANOTHER CITY, ANOTHER TEACHER.



WHEN HE WAS 20, HE DECIDED TO SETTLE IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL.

HE SOUGHT OUT THE RECRUITING OFFICER OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION.

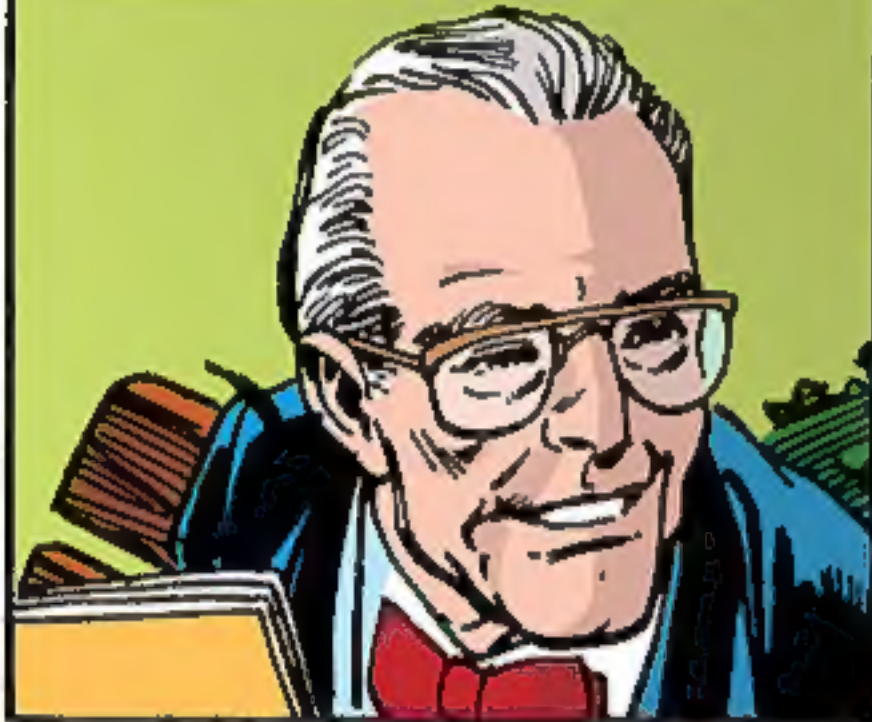


"WELL, BRUCE, THESE TEST SCORES ARE IMPRESSIVE, TO SAY THE LEAST," THE MAN SAID. "ALL EXCEPT FOR YOUR TARGET SHOOTING--AND JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME AND THE FENCE POST, A FEDERAL OFFICER DOESN'T PULL HIS PIECE MUCH. WE LEAVE THAT TO EFREM ZIMBALIST, JUNIOR."

THE MAN CHUCKLED.



"OF COURSE, WE PREFER COLLEGE GRADS--WHEN J. EDGAR WAS RUNNING THE SHOW, THE SHEEPSKIN WAS MANDATORY--AND WE LIKE A LAW DEGREE, BUT IN YOUR CASE, WE CAN WAIVE THE ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS."



BRUCE ENTERED FBI TRAINING.



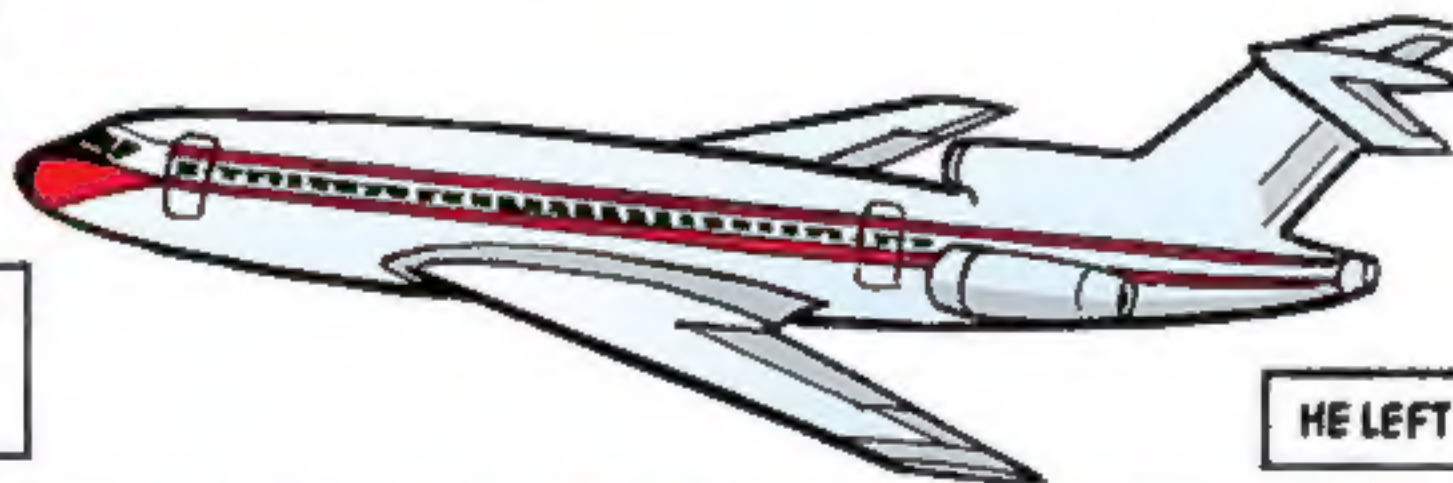
HE STAYED IN IT FOR EXACTLY SIX WEEKS.

DURING THAT TIME, HE'D LEARNED MUCH ABOUT WRITING REPORTS, OBEYING REGULATIONS, ANALYZING STATISTICS, AND DRESSING NEATLY... AND NOTHING ELSE.



THE EXPERIENCE CONFIRMED A SUSPICION HE'D LONG HAD: HE COULD NOT OPERATE WITHIN A SYSTEM.

PEOPLE WHO CAUSED OTHER PEOPLE TO FALL DID NOT RECOGNIZE SYSTEMS.



HE LEFT FOR KOREA THAT NIGHT.

IT WASN'T EASY TO FIND THE TEMPLE, HIGH IN THE PAKTU-SAN MOUNTAINS--IT TOOK HIM SIX WEEKS AND FORTY THOUSAND DOLLARS IN BRIBES--BUT FINALLY HE STOOD IN FRONT OF THE MASSIVE DOOR.

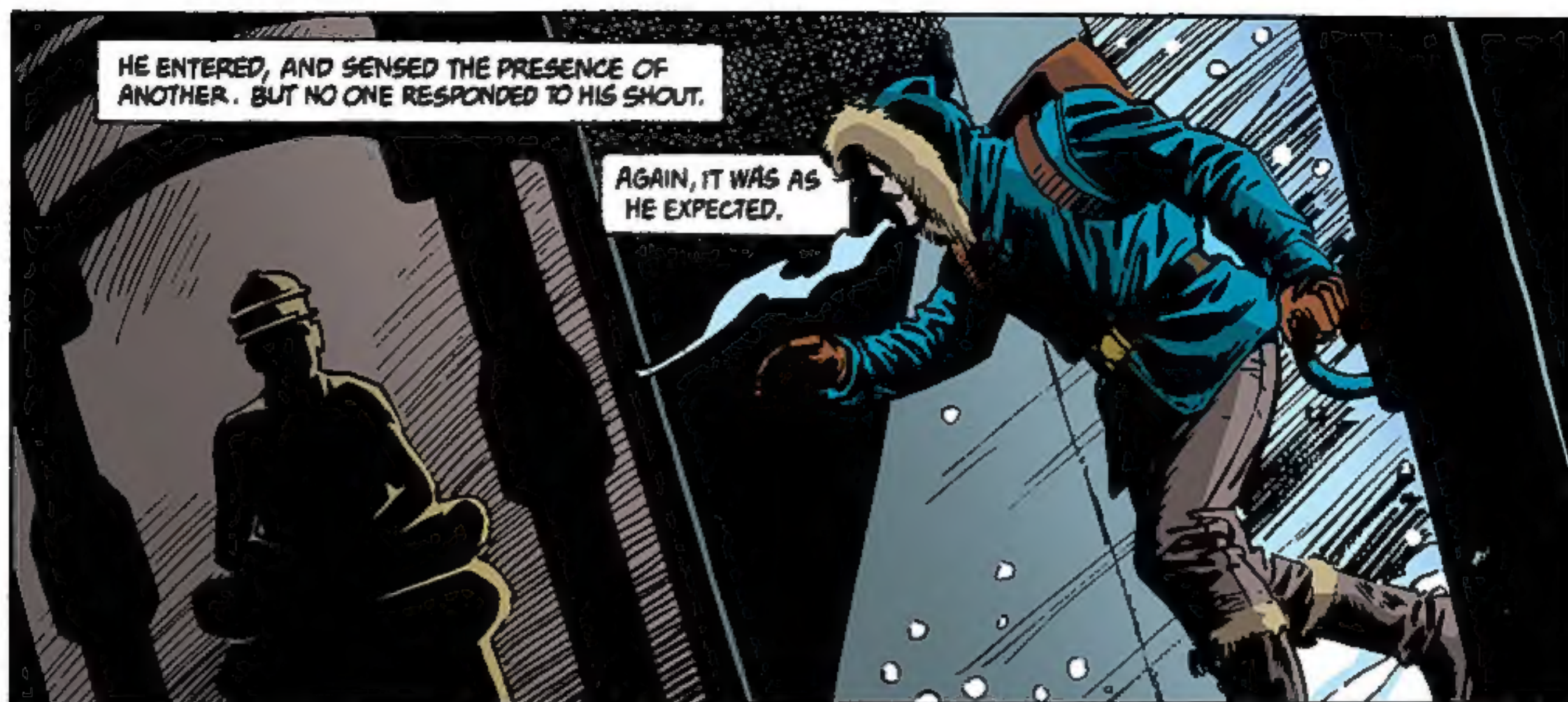


HIS KNOCK WASN'T ANSWERED. HE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT IT WOULDN'T BE.

BUT HIS INFORMANT HAD GIVEN HIM THE SECRET SEQUENCE FOR ROTATING THE KNOBS.

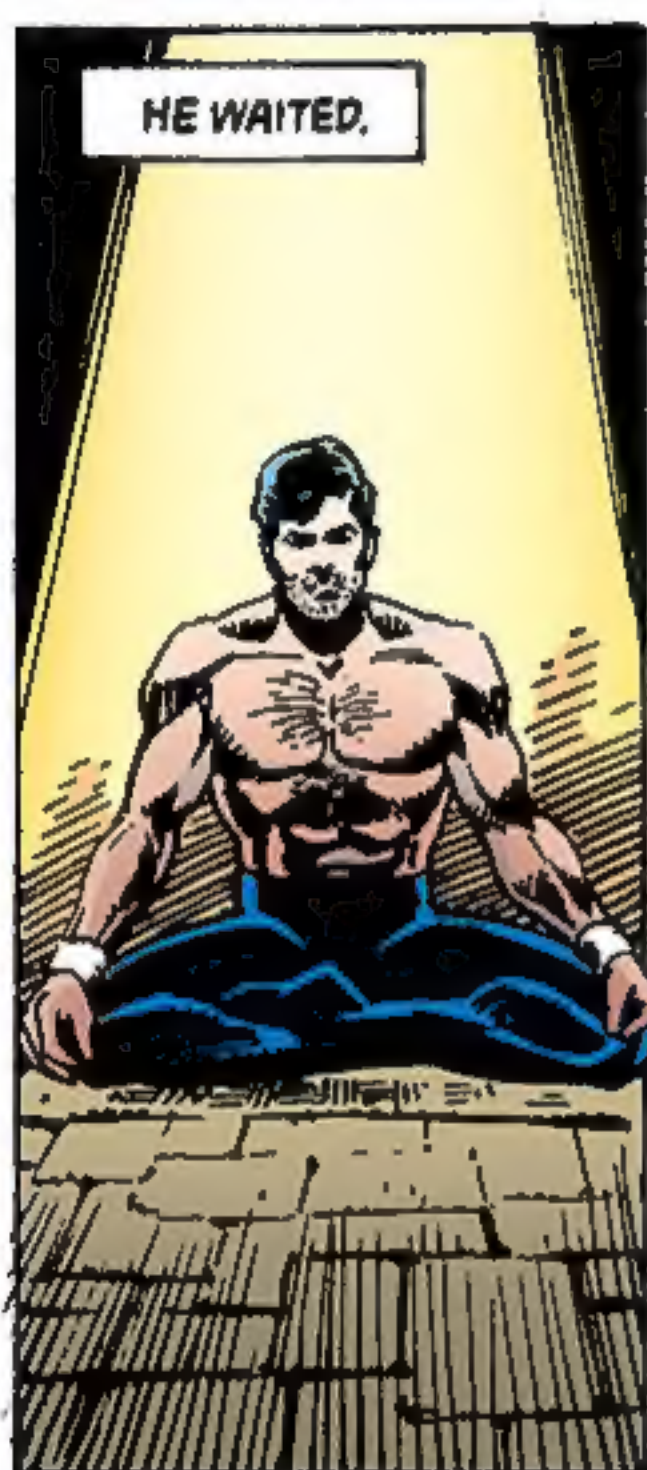






HE ENTERED, AND SENSED THE PRESENCE OF ANOTHER. BUT NO ONE RESPONDED TO HIS SHOUT.

AGAIN, IT WAS AS HE EXPECTED.



HE WAITED.

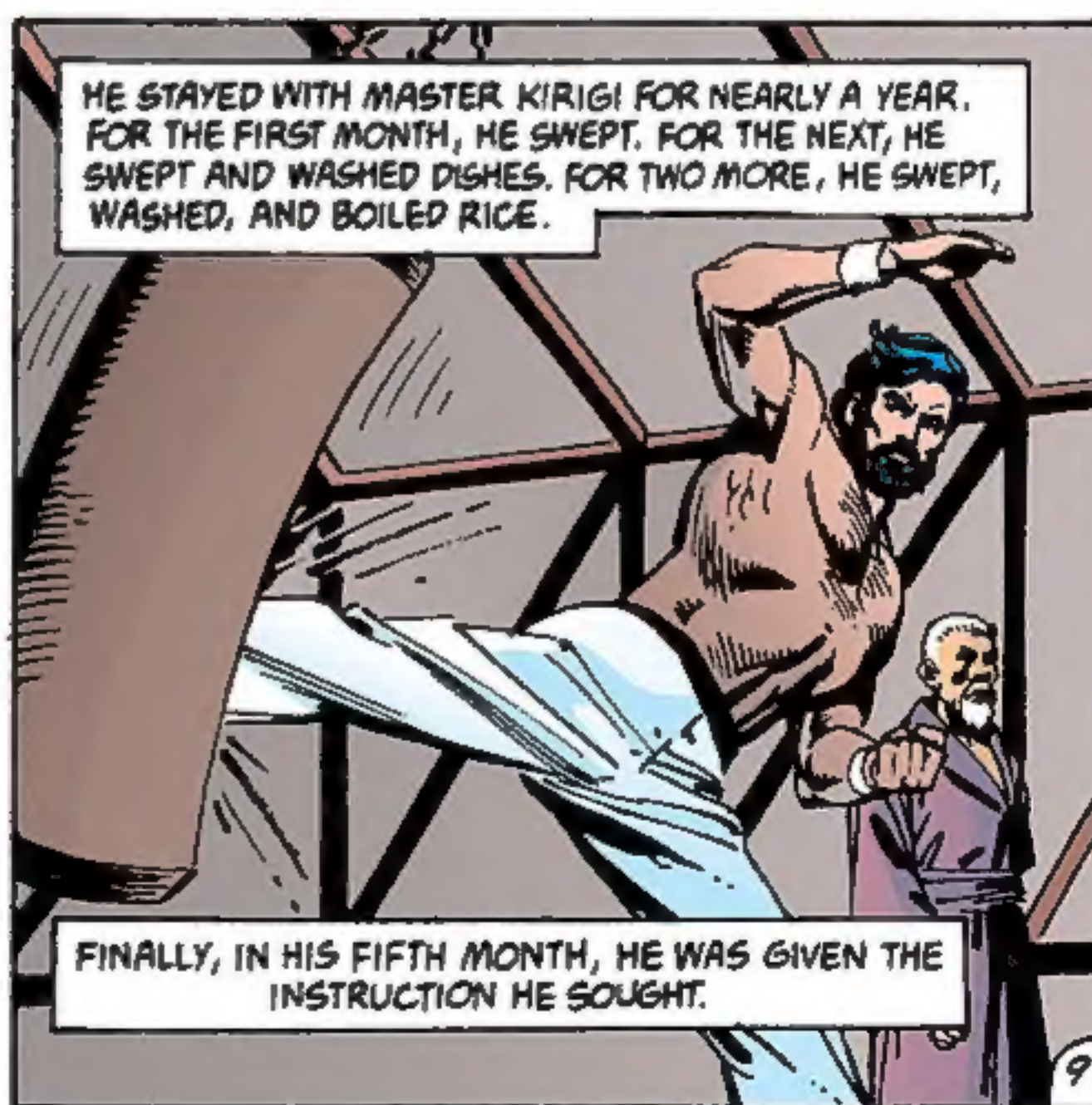


FOR THREE WEEKS.



THEN:

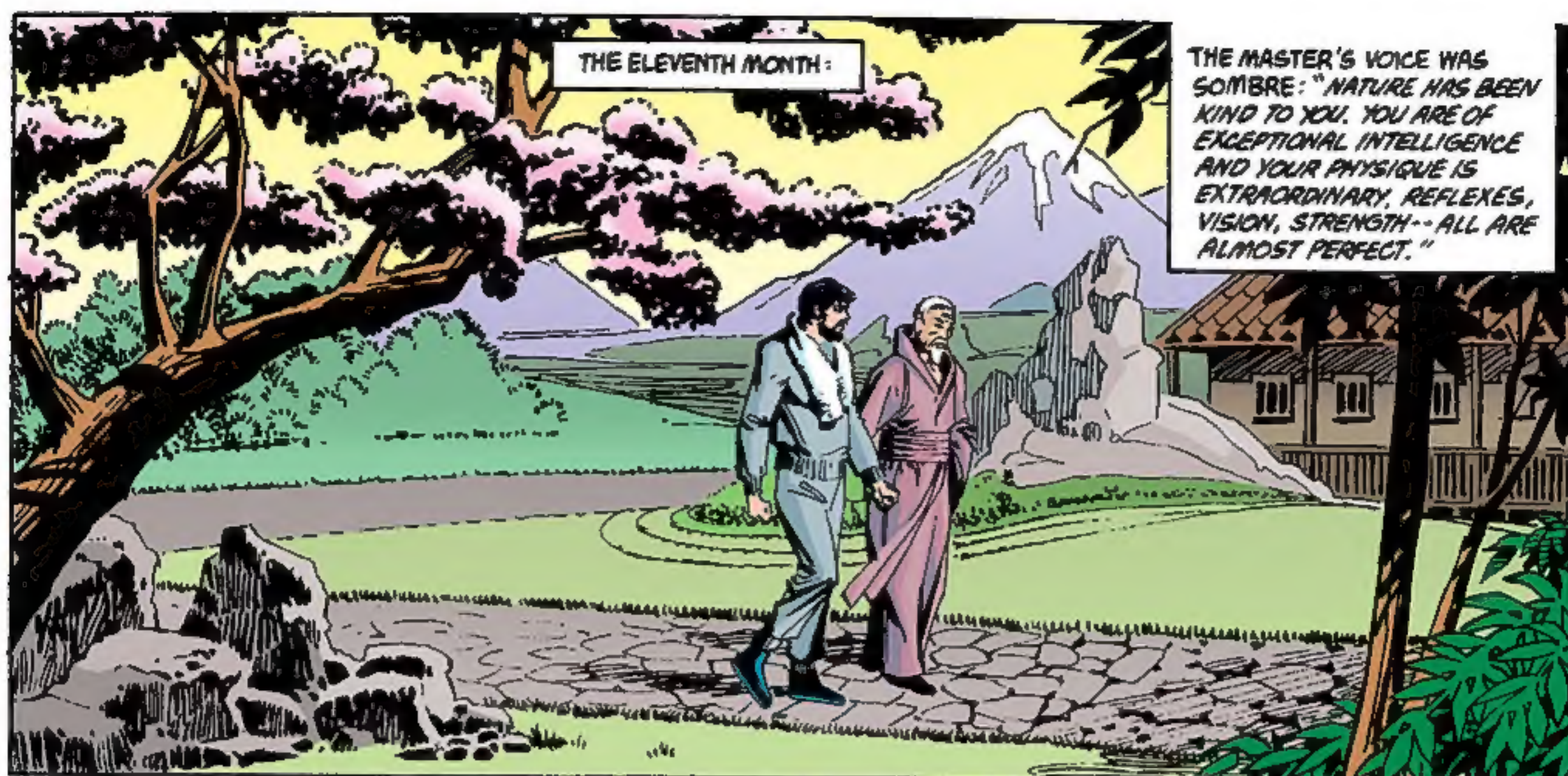
"YOU MAY  
SWEEP THE  
FLOOR."



HE STAYED WITH MASTER KIRIGI FOR NEARLY A YEAR. FOR THE FIRST MONTH, HE SWEEPED. FOR THE NEXT, HE SWEEPED AND WASHED DISHES. FOR TWO MORE, HE SWEEPED, WASHED, AND BOILED RICE.

FINALLY, IN HIS FIFTH MONTH, HE WAS GIVEN THE INSTRUCTION HE SOUGHT.





THE MASTER'S VOICE WAS SOMBRE: "NATURE HAS BEEN KIND TO YOU. YOU ARE OF EXCEPTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND YOUR PHYSIQUE IS EXTRAORDINARY. REFLEXES, VISION, STRENGTH-- ALL ARE ALMOST PERFECT."



"HOW TERRIBLE FOR YOU."



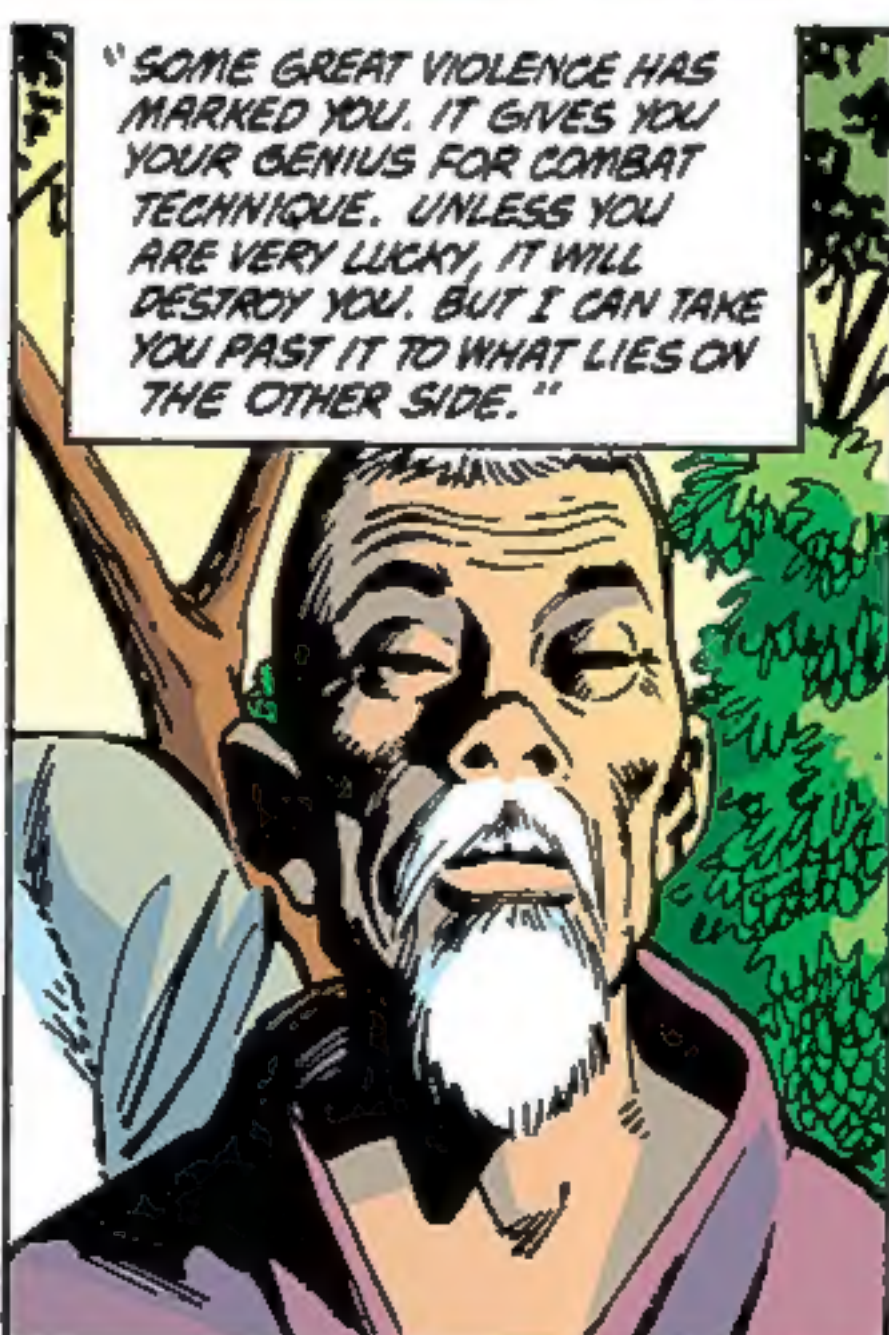
"WHY?"



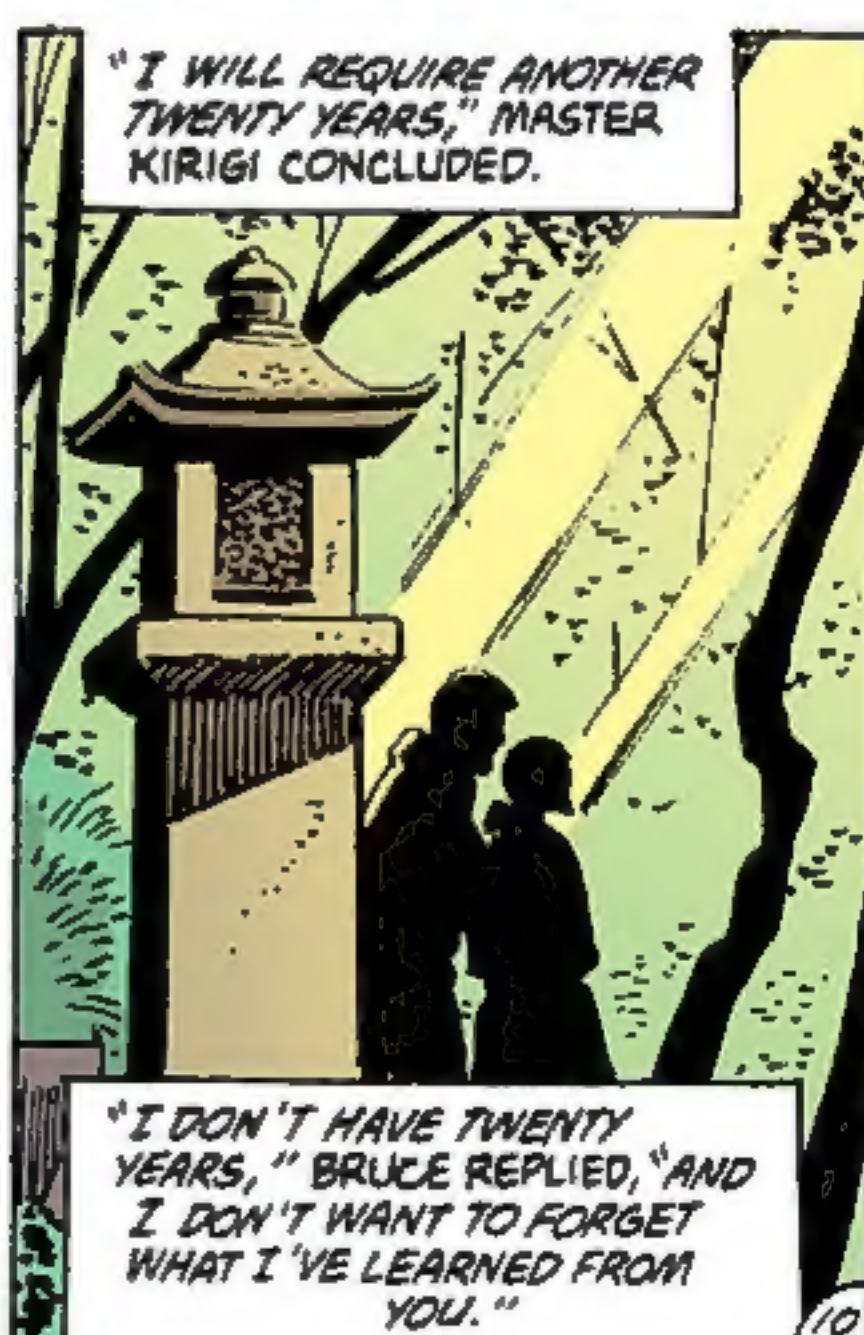
"YOU CANNOT VALUE WHAT COMES SO EASILY," WIND ROARED THROUGH THE CANYONS AND THERE WAS A DISTANT RUMBLE OF THUNDER. "THE ONLY THING I CAN TEACH YOU NOW IS HOW TO IGNORE ALL I HAVE TAUGHT YOU THUS FAR."



"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND."



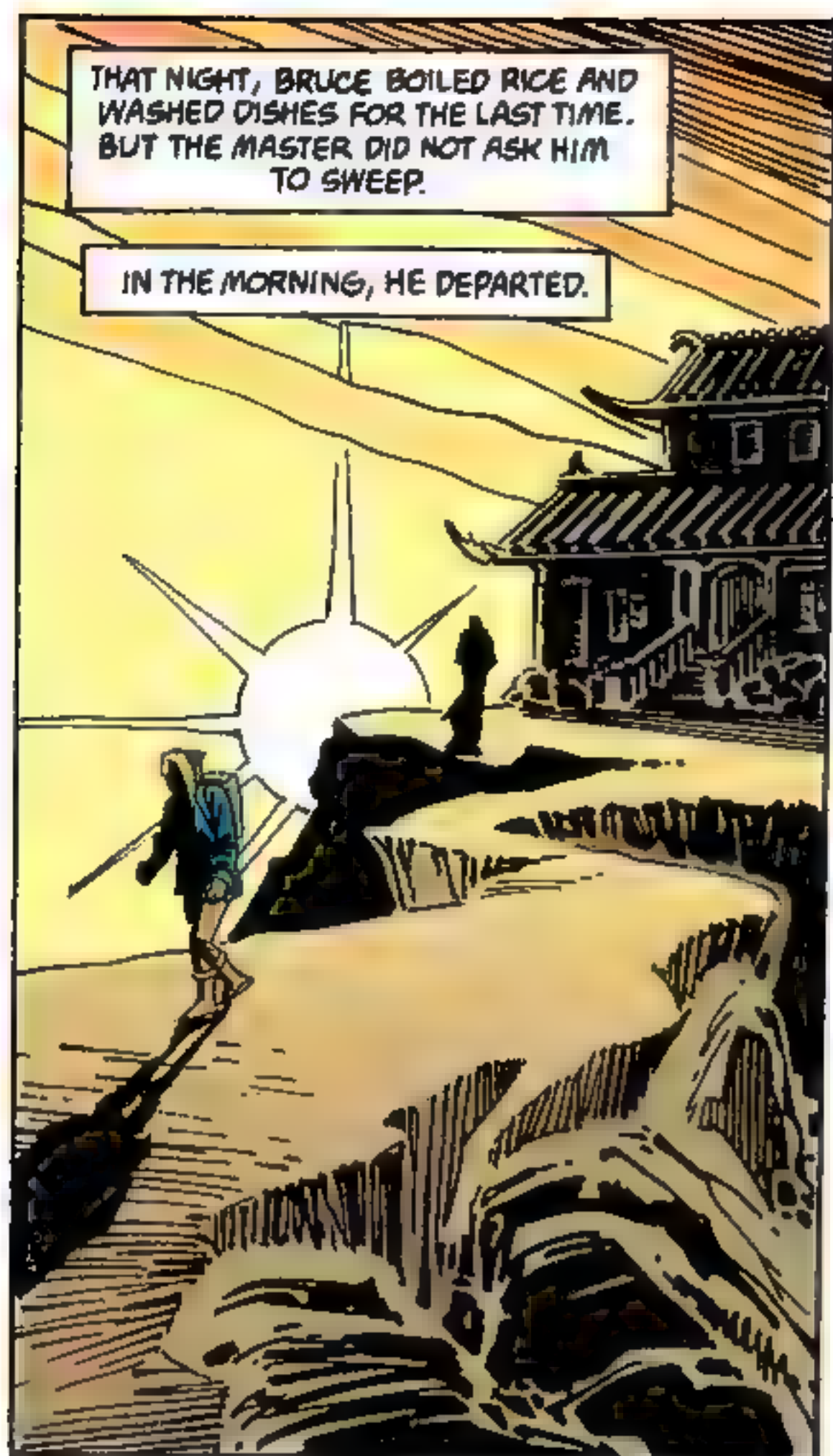
"SOME GREAT VIOLENCE HAS MARKED YOU. IT GIVES YOU YOUR GENIUS FOR COMBAT TECHNIQUE. UNLESS YOU ARE VERY LUCKY, IT WILL DESTROY YOU. BUT I CAN TAKE YOU PAST IT TO WHAT LIES ON THE OTHER SIDE."



"I WILL REQUIRE ANOTHER TWENTY YEARS," MASTER KIRIGI CONCLUDED.

"I DON'T HAVE TWENTY YEARS," BRUCE REPLIED, "AND I DON'T WANT TO FORGET WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM YOU."





THAT NIGHT, BRUCE BOILED RICE AND WASHED DISHES FOR THE LAST TIME. BUT THE MASTER DID NOT ASK HIM TO SWEEP.

IN THE MORNING, HE DEPARTED.

FRANCE WAS NEXT.



A MAN NAMED DUCARD SHOWED BRUCE THE USES OF BRUTALITY, DECEPTION, CUNNING.



A FUGITIVE THEY HAD BEEN TRACKING DIED -- UNNECESSARILY, BRUCE THOUGHT.



"YOU BECOME AS BAD AS ANYONE YOU HUNT," BRUCE SHOUTED.

"NO," THE FRENCHMAN SAID WITH HIS CHARACTERISTIC SMUGNESS... "I HAVE NOT BECOME -- I ALWAYS WAS. I AM. AS ARE YOU."



BRUCE STALKED AWAY. DUCARD LET HIM GO. BOTH LATER REGRETTED THEIR INACTION.

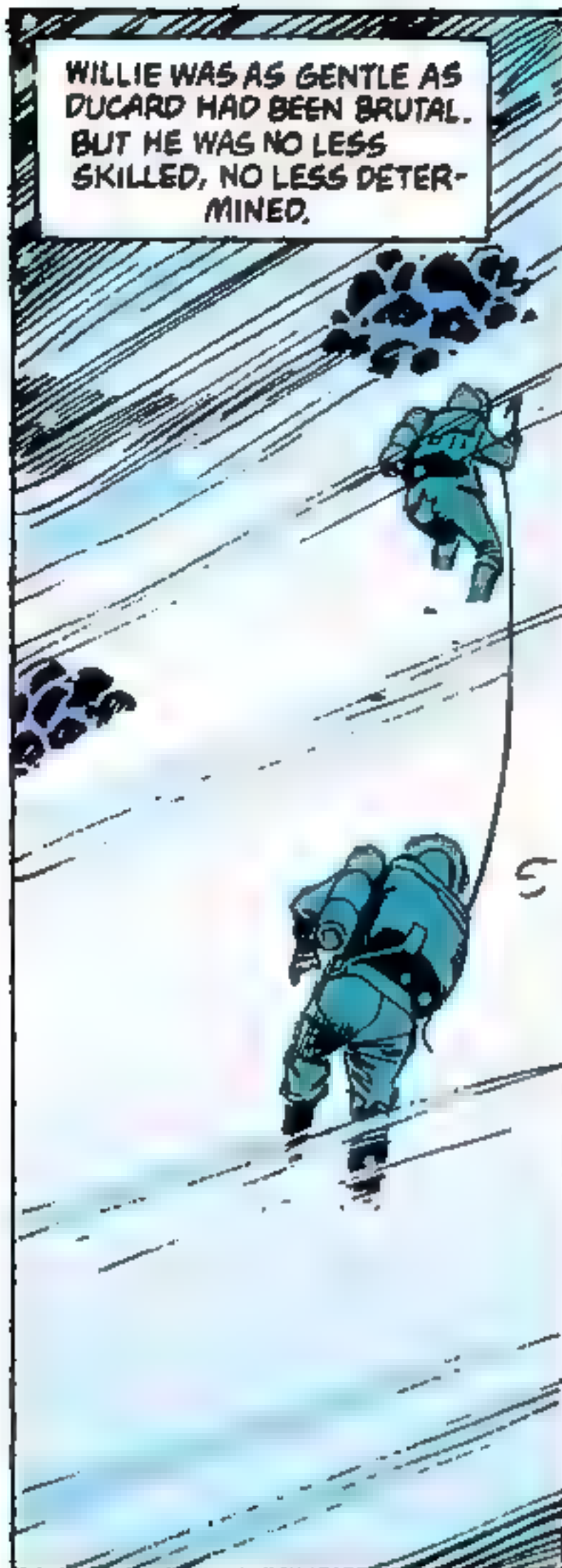


BY THEN, HE WAS IN HIS EARLY TWENTIES. HE HAD STUDIED WITH, OR AT LEAST SPOKEN TO, EVERY EMINENT DETECTIVE IN THE WORLD.

EXCEPT ONE

TO FIND WILLIE DOGGETT, HE HAD TO LEAVE CIVILIZATION.





WILLIE WAS AS GENTLE AS DUCARD HAD BEEN BRUTAL. BUT HE WAS NO LESS SKILLED, NO LESS DETERMINED.



THEY TRAILED TOM WOODLEY TO A MOUNTAIN LEDGE. THERE, WILLIE DIED.



WOODLEY THOUGHT HE DIDN'T NEED HIS RIFLE TO DEAL WITH THE CITY BOY.



HE WAS WRONG.



BUT BRUCE'S VICTORY HAD BEEN COSTLY. HE HAD LOST HIS PACK, HIS PARKA --

--EVERYTHING HE NEEDED TO SURVIVE THE LETHAL COLD.

HE FELL.



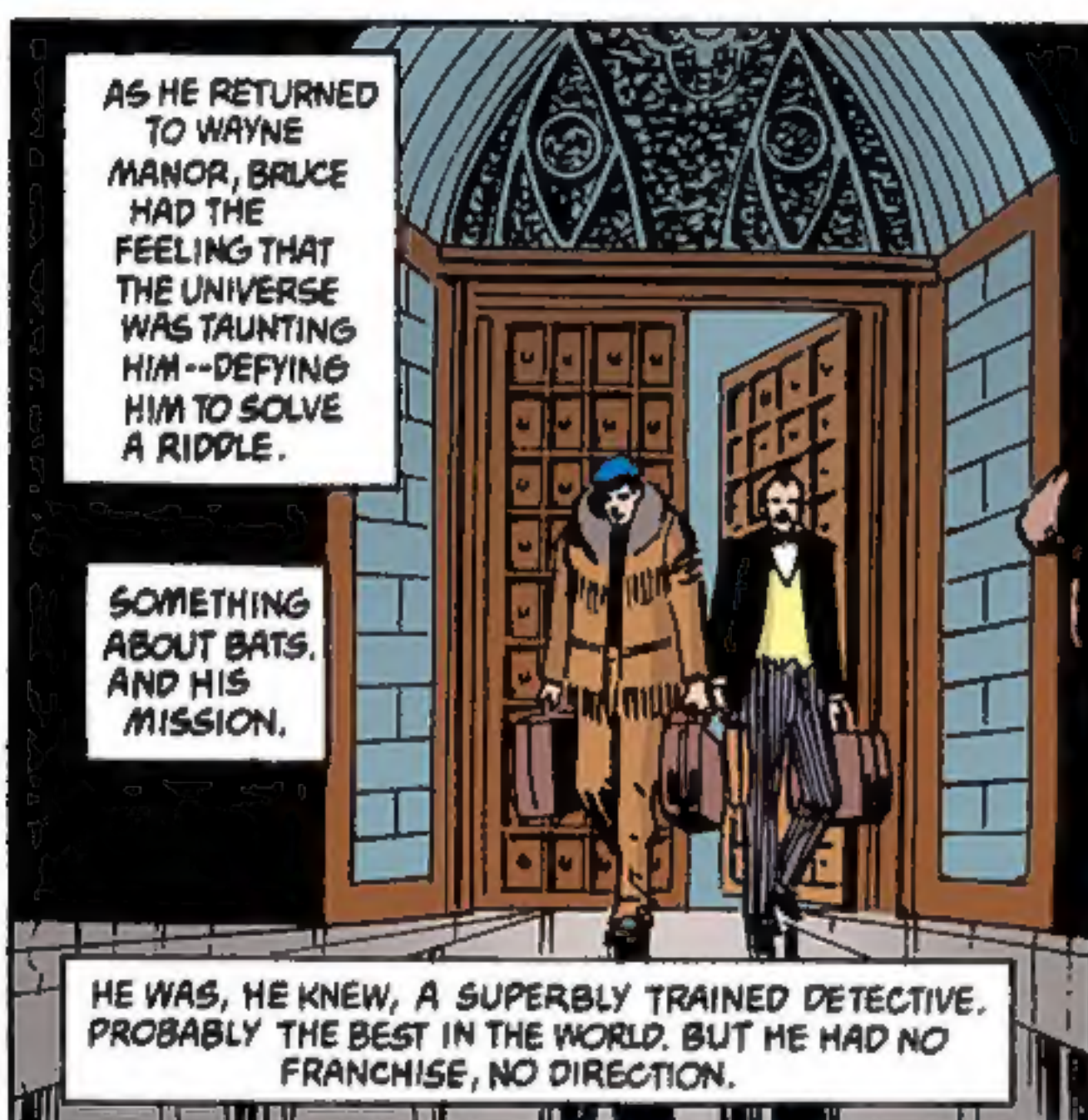


THE INDIAN SHAMAN WHO RESCUED HIM WORE THE MASK OF A BEAST SACRED TO HIS TRIBE. THE MASK OF THE BAT.



LATER, THE OLD MAN SAID, "YOU HAVE THE MARK. IN YOUR EYES. THE MARK OF THE BAT."

MASTER KIRIBI HAD ALSO SAID BRUCE WAS MARKED.



AS HE RETURNED TO WAYNE MANOR, BRUCE HAD THE FEELING THAT THE UNIVERSE WAS TAUNTING HIM--DEFYING HIM TO SOLVE A RIDDLE.

SOMETHING ABOUT BATS. AND HIS MISSION.

HE WAS, HE KNEW, A SUPERBLY TRAINED DETECTIVE. PROBABLY THE BEST IN THE WORLD. BUT HE HAD NO FRANCHISE, NO DIRECTION.



HIS DEBUT AS A CRIME-FIGHTER WAS A DISMAL FAILURE.



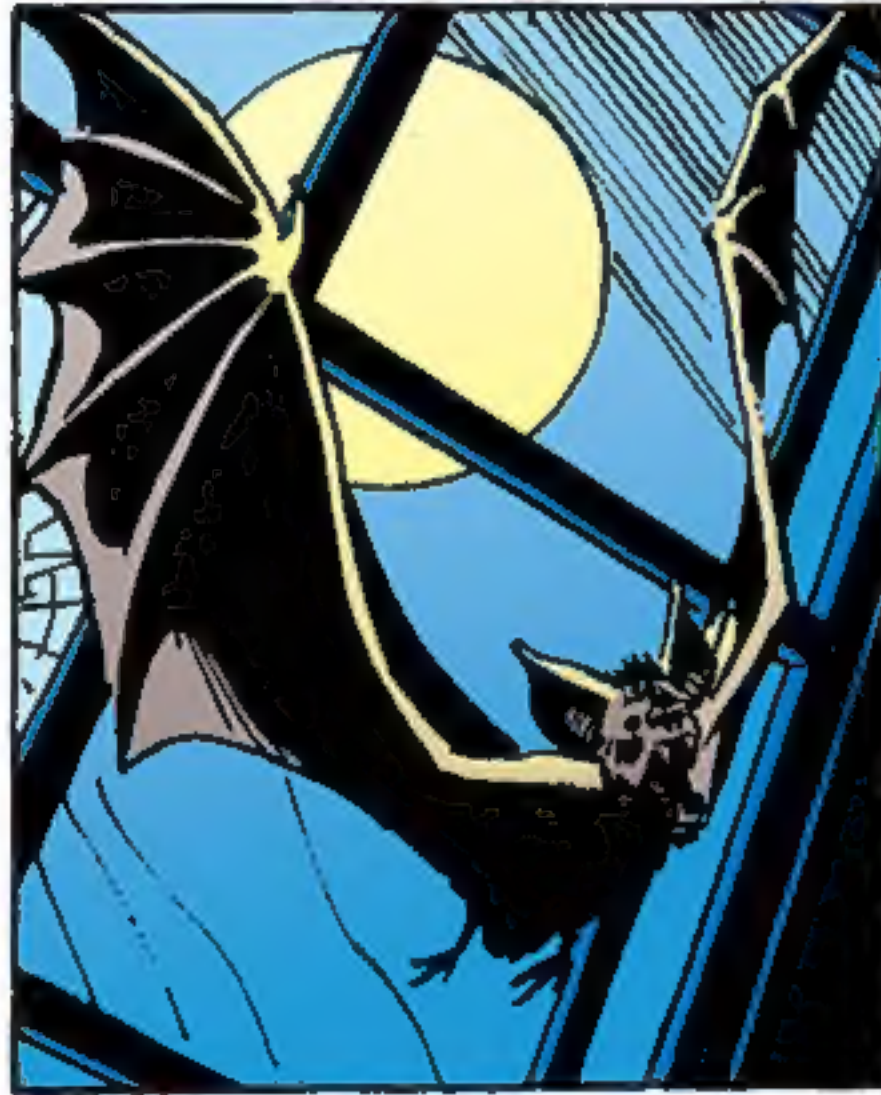
HUMILIATED, HE RETIRED TO THE LIBRARY WHERE ONCE HIS FATHER HAD STUDIED MEDICAL TEXTS. HE OPENED A CENTURY-OLD VOLUME AND READ: "CRIMINALS ARE A COWARDLY AND SUPERSTITIOUS LOT."



HE HEARD A FAINT NOISE AT THE WINDOW--A HISSING, A CHITTERING.

THEN, ONLY THE TICKING OF A CLOCK AND THE CREAKS AND GROANS OF AN OLD HOUSE.





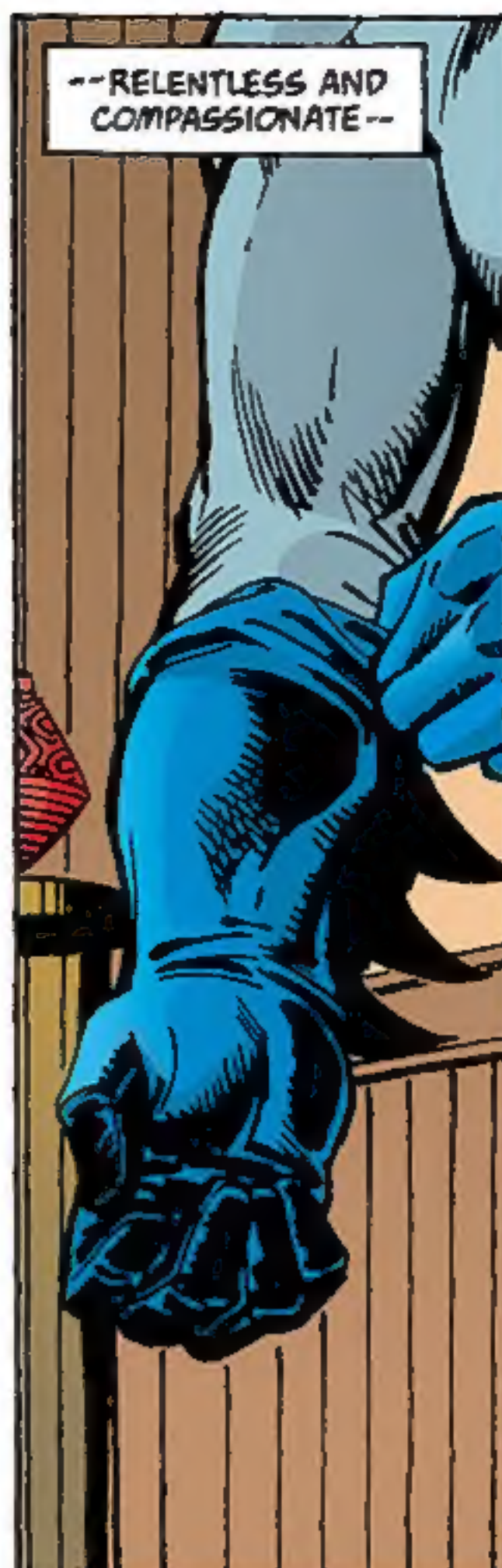




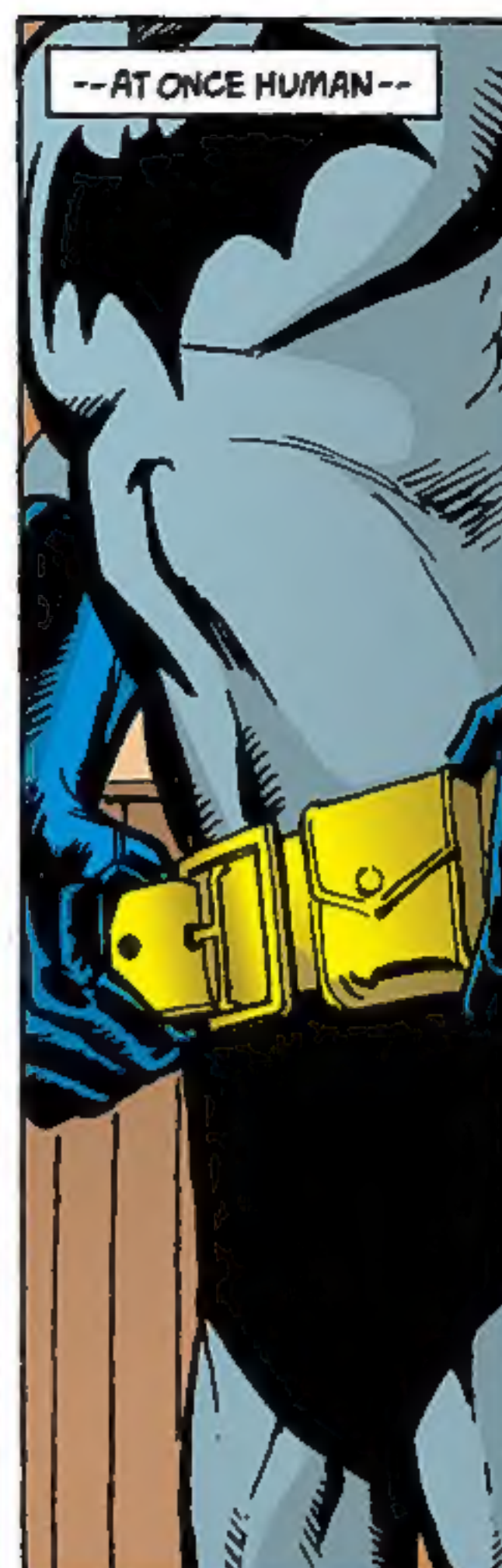
SOMETHING THAT HAD NEVER EXISTED BEFORE--



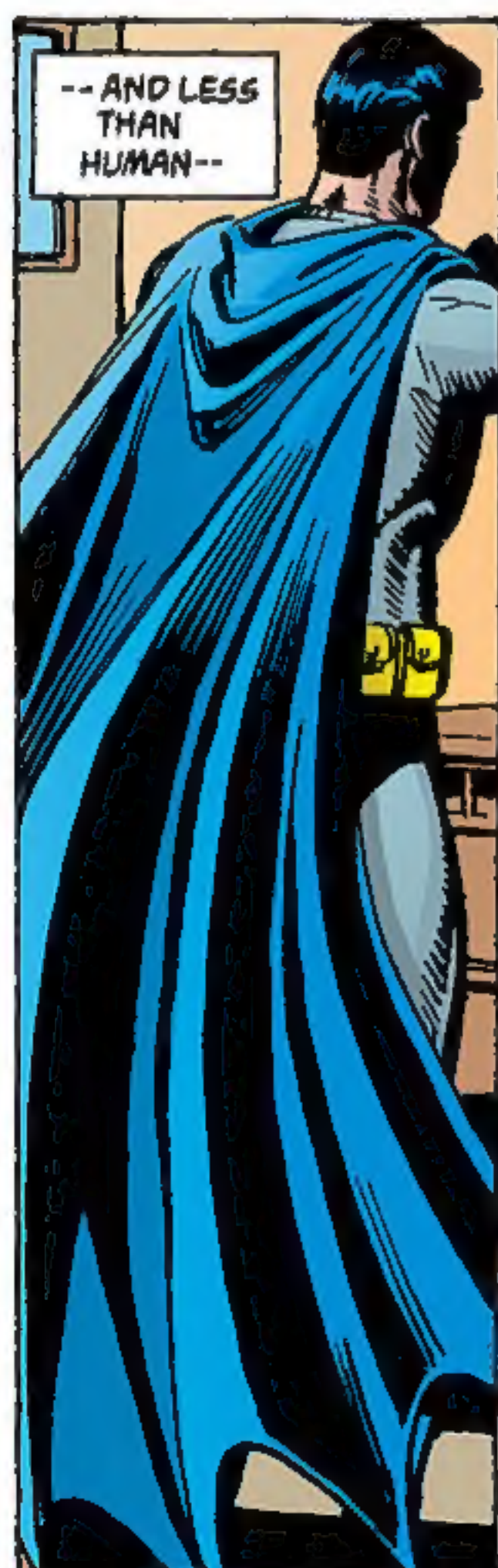
--A NOCTURNAL AVENGER--



--RELENTLESS AND COMPASSIONATE--



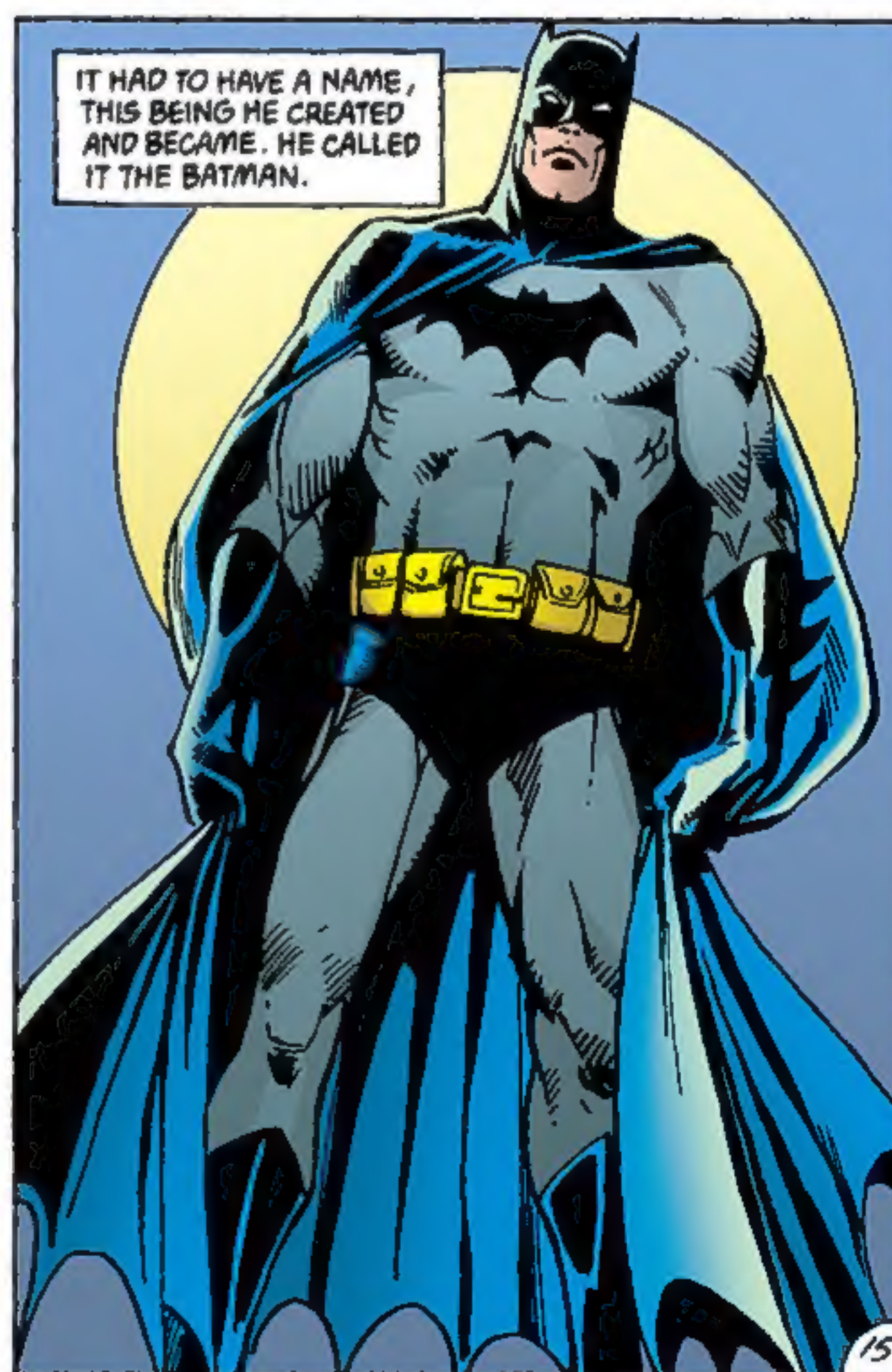
--AT ONCE HUMAN--



-- AND LESS THAN HUMAN--



-- AND MORE.



IT HAD TO HAVE A NAME, THIS BEING HE CREATED AND BECAME. HE CALLED IT THE BATMAN.



HE STANDS, TENSES,  
RELAXES. THE  
TIME HAS COME.

HE BREATHES  
DEEPLY, FILLING  
HIMSELF WITH  
THE NIGHT--

-- AND STEPS  
FORWARD AND FALLS--

-- AS HE FELL WHEN  
HE WAS A CHILD--

-- AS HE WILL FALL  
FOR THE REST OF  
HIS LIFE...

